

PTERYGIUM

A pterygium is a pinkish, triangular-shaped tissue growth on the cornea. Some pterygia grow slowly throughout a person’s life, while others stop growing after a certain point. A pterygium rarely grows so large that it begins to cover the pupil of the eye.

Pterygia are more common in sunny climates and in the 20-40 age group. Scientists do not know what causes pterygia to develop. However, since people who have pterygia usually have spent a significant time outdoors, many doctors believe ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun may be a factor. In areas where sunlight is strong, wearing protective eyeglasses, sunglasses, and/or hats with brims are suggested. While some studies report a higher prevalence of pterygia in men than in women, this may reflect different rates of exposure to UV light.

Since a pterygium is visible, many people want to have it removed for cosmetic reasons. It is usually not too noticeable unless it becomes red and swollen from dust or air pollutants. Lubricants can reduce the redness and provide relief from the chronic irritation. Surgery to remove a pterygium may be considered if it is bothersome or causing visual change. Occasionally, a pterygium may grow back following surgery.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

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